

3 Things All Newly-Wed Couples Should Know

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On your wedding day you say “I do” because you can’t imagine living life with anyone else. You look into each other’s eyes and just know that you are headed for a lifetime of bliss. You commit to share everything with your love and align your future hopes and dreams with theirs.

Almost immediately, however, before your vows have even been tucked away for safekeeping, you begin to notice discrepancies between what you are experiencing and what you imagined marriage to be. Quite quickly, unforeseen and hurtful situations may arise. In fact, a recent study found that it is typical among all newlywed couples to experience a steady increase of dissatisfaction and problems beginning shortly after the wedding. You can understand this quietly building tension if you’ve had roommates. Before moving in with them, you didn’t care what their bathroom looked like or if the dishes were left in the sink, because you went home at night. The commitment of sharing a life and home introduces a new level of expectation and often frustration.



Leading marriage expert John Gottman knows this truth as well, and he has dedicated his life’s work to researching married couples who are able to achieve and sustain long-lasting happiness in their relationships. After studying thousands of couples, he has pinned down the most common patterns that lead to fulfilling, stable marriages. As he studied marriages, he also studied divorce. He saw the ways that couples can foster contempt and ruin the love enjoyed early in the relationship.

What Builds a Marriage?

Gottman and other researchers have shown that practicing positivity, showing appreciation and kindness, and using “I” statements--such as I don’t feel appreciated when I make dinner-- lead to flourishing, healthy marriages. Gottman emphasizes it’s the little things that matter in establishing a happy, long-lasting marriage. Some of these little things include

- Using “I” statements when bringing up conflict.
- Understanding and learning more about who your spouse is by asking deep, meaningful questions.
- Thinking kind thoughts and finding positive things to say about your spouse daily.
- Walking away for a few minutes from a conflict when you know you are too upset to calmly discuss the issue at that time.
- Looking for ways to show love with small gestures.

What Tears Down a Marriage?

In his research to determine which factors tear down marriages most, Gottman has defined these three specific patterns as being the main factors correlated with divorce.

1. Rejecting your spouse's influence



As Gottman says, the hardest part about marriage is that every one of us seems to marry someone who is just not perfect—not like we are, anyway!

Your partner will have different opinions than you do. In order to fulfill the notion of truly “becoming one,” it’s important to accept each other’s influence. Accepting influence does not mean that you always do whatever your spouse says. It means you honestly listen to and actively consider their thought-out suggestions for improvement in your marriage. Try asking yourself, “If I were expressing my opinion on the matter, how would I want my spouse to respond?” This will help you to respond more attentively and kindly.

Accepting a partner’s influence is especially important for women to feel. Gottman found the pattern of not accepting a partner’s influence to be particularly destructive when performed by men. Ask yourself what went through your mind the last time your spouse brought up something where you may not have the same degree of interest, care, or understanding. Your thoughts may have sounded similar to one of these:

“He’s just overreacting.” “He will change his mind about that soon.” “Her hormones are acting up.” “She doesn’t know what she’s talking about.”

Not listening means you’re dismissing your partner’s thought and feelings and that never builds a relationship.

Consider an alternate choice: honesty. Honesty breeds intimacy. You may say something like, “Dear, I will be honest. I don’t agree with you,” or, “I don’t understand you.” When you do this, you are accepting the influence of your spouse, without losing your identity and becoming someone you’re not.

2. Expressing influence with negative start-ups



Perhaps you are the one who is feeling rejected whenever you try to express concern in the relationship. You may want to appraise the way you have been starting-up your conversations.

A negative start-up is beginning any complaint with “you” and using absolute language like “always” and “never.”

Negative start-ups sound something like the following: “You always do this...”; “You never do ... anymore.”

Beginning a complaint offensively or with blame is the easiest way to ensure a spouse does not accept your influence. Instead, they will defend themselves, which is the natural human survival instinct. We tend to match the tone and speed of our partner—[Gottman’s research](#) shows 96% of negative start-ups end the same way they began

– meaning, if the conversation is initiated with contempt or anger, it will end in anger or contempt.

When you need to share a complaint or possibility for improvement, this is what you could say instead of defaulting to a negative startup.

“I feel overwhelmed with all of the chores ...”; “I could really use some help with the dishes ...”: “I really am upset by how ...”

Take a moment to breathe, and ponder your feelings before bringing up a controversial topic; practice start-ups using “I” instead of “You.” You may also consider whether there is anything you can change before consulting with your partner. You have the power to eliminate small but destructive conflicts early in your marriage.

If there’s one thing you remember...

Gottman’s research extends over the past 40 years. He can identify these negative patterns in couples that lead to divorce quicker than we can count to 180 (*literally!*). With this expertise, he has been able to dig deep into the quality of relationships. In an [interview](#) with John and Julie Gottman, they relate a deeper sentiment of marriage that leads to lifelong joy. Simply—kindness.

Kindness, when expressed in moments of conflict and high anxiety, will melt hardened hearts and bind weak links. Kindness, when it’s easy to point out faults or unmet needs, will open your eyes and heart in order to not only feel healed, but to feel whole together.

Kindness. If you still find yourself unable to break these habits of conflict, look a little deeper. When you looked deeply into each other’s eyes on that fateful wedding day, there came with it a depth of commitment and patience that you may not have fully understood. Decide to take the big risk to make a little change in how you communicate, and in doing so, show true and genuine kindness to the one with whom you promised “till’ death do you part.”